

**DECISION NOTICE**  
**WHEELBARROW CREEK AND SPRING GULCH CHANNEL**  
**STABILIZATION PROJECT**

**Prepared by**  
**Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks**  
**October 7, 2008**

**I.     Proposal**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to provide partial funding through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to a project calling for restoring short reaches of degraded channel at the confluence of Wheelbarrow Creek and Spring Gulch, tributaries located in the Threemile Creek watershed of the Bitterroot drainage.

**II.    Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA)**

MEPA required FWP to assess the potential consequences of the proposed action for the human and natural environment. The proposal was detailed in an Environmental Assessment (EA) released by FWP on August 26, 2008. The 30-day comment period for this EA ended September 26, 2008.

Issues raised during the public comment period for this EA are addressed in the Comments section of this Decision Notice. The draft EA and Decision Notice will serve as the final document.

**III.   Summary of Public Comment**

One written comment was received in response to the draft EA. No other comments were received. Issues brought forward from this written comment included:

**1. We take this opportunity to note the absence of fish data from the localities under consideration for improvement. While there are multiple statements in the EA regarding enhancement of fisheries, these would be significantly more convincing if data regarding fish species presence, abundance, and genetic integrity of westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout were presented. We encourage FWP to include such critical elements of proposed projects in Future Fisheries EAs.**

Response: To our knowledge, fish populations have not been surveyed in Wheelbarrow Creek and Spring Gulch. The statements found within the draft EA regarding the fisheries at the confluence of Wheelbarrow Creek and Spring Gulch were based upon professional judgment from the local FWP biologist. Fish populations have been surveyed in several reaches of Threemile Creek. Wheelbarrow Creek and Spring Gulch are tributaries within the Threemile Creek drainage. Survey

sites nearest this proposed project were located approximately 3 miles down drainage, as well as approximately 6 miles up drainage. Brook trout and westslope cutthroat trout were sampled in both survey sites. At the upper site, brook trout abundance was estimated to be 17 fish per 1000 feet of stream. Westslope cutthroat abundance was estimated to be 348 fish per 1000 feet of stream. Genetic testing of westslope cutthroat trout in the upper survey site indicated that these fish were non-introgressed. These data were used to predict expected fisheries metrics located at the confluence of Wheelbarrow Creek and Spring Gulch.

On-site fisheries benefits of this proposed project likely are minimal due to limited project scope. However, the primary intent of this project is to reduce sediment and nutrient loading into downstream waters and would compliment a number of previous successfully completed projects. This ongoing watershed effort ultimately is intended to benefit the fisheries in the both the Threemile Creek watershed and in the Bitterroot River.

#### **IV. Modifications to the Environmental Assessment**

Modifications to the draft EA are deemed unnecessary.

#### **V. Decision**

After review of the proposal, it is my decision to proceed with funding through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program for the Wheelbarrow Creek and Spring Gulch Channel Stabilization Project. The action will benefit the fisheries in the Threemile Creek drainage.

I find there to be no significant impacts associated with this action and conclude that an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. The completed EA and the Decision Notice provide an adequate level of analysis.

---

Chris Hunter, Administrator  
Fisheries Division